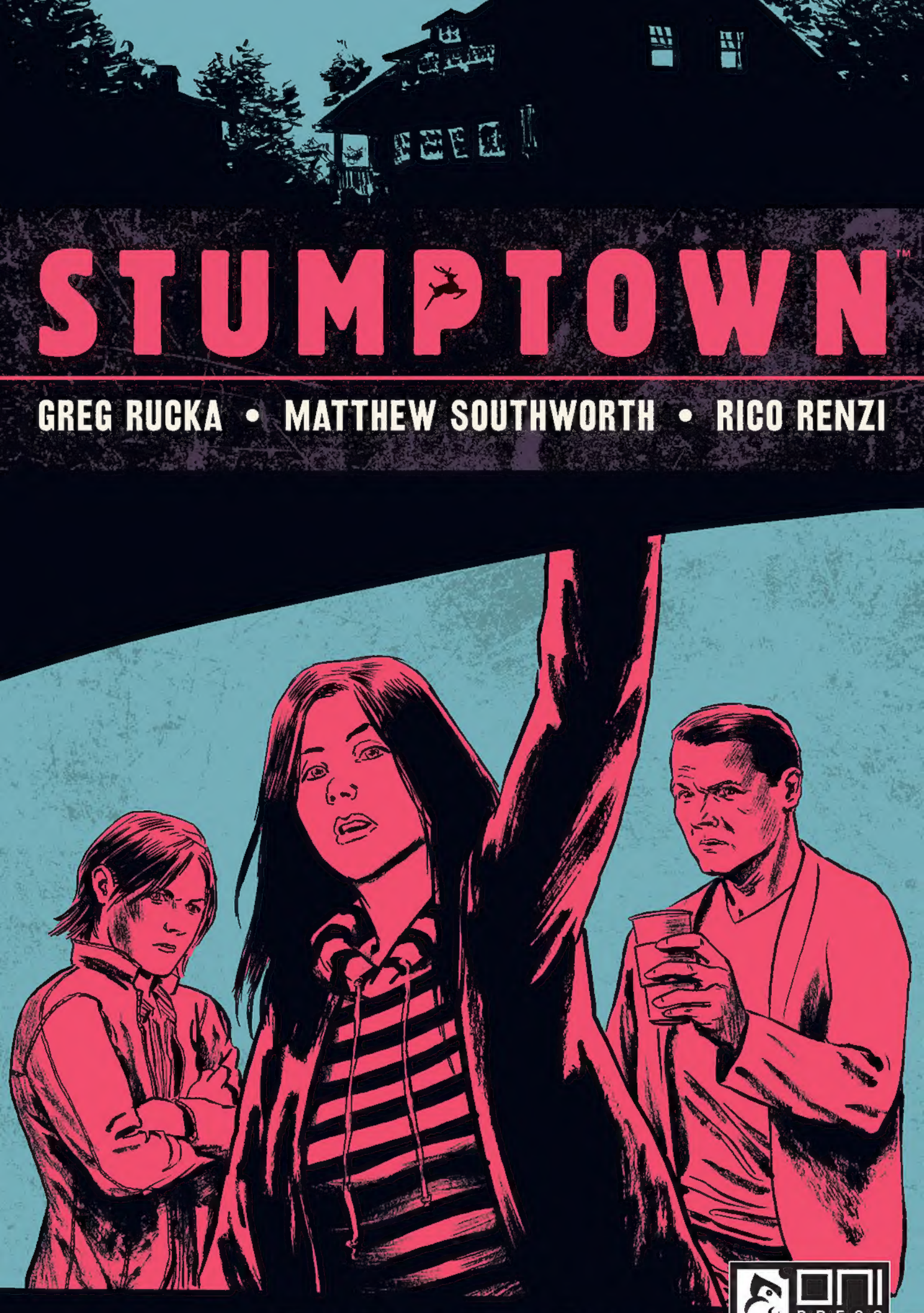

# STUMPTOWN™

GREG RUCKA • MATTHEW SOUTHWORTH • RICO RENZI

## The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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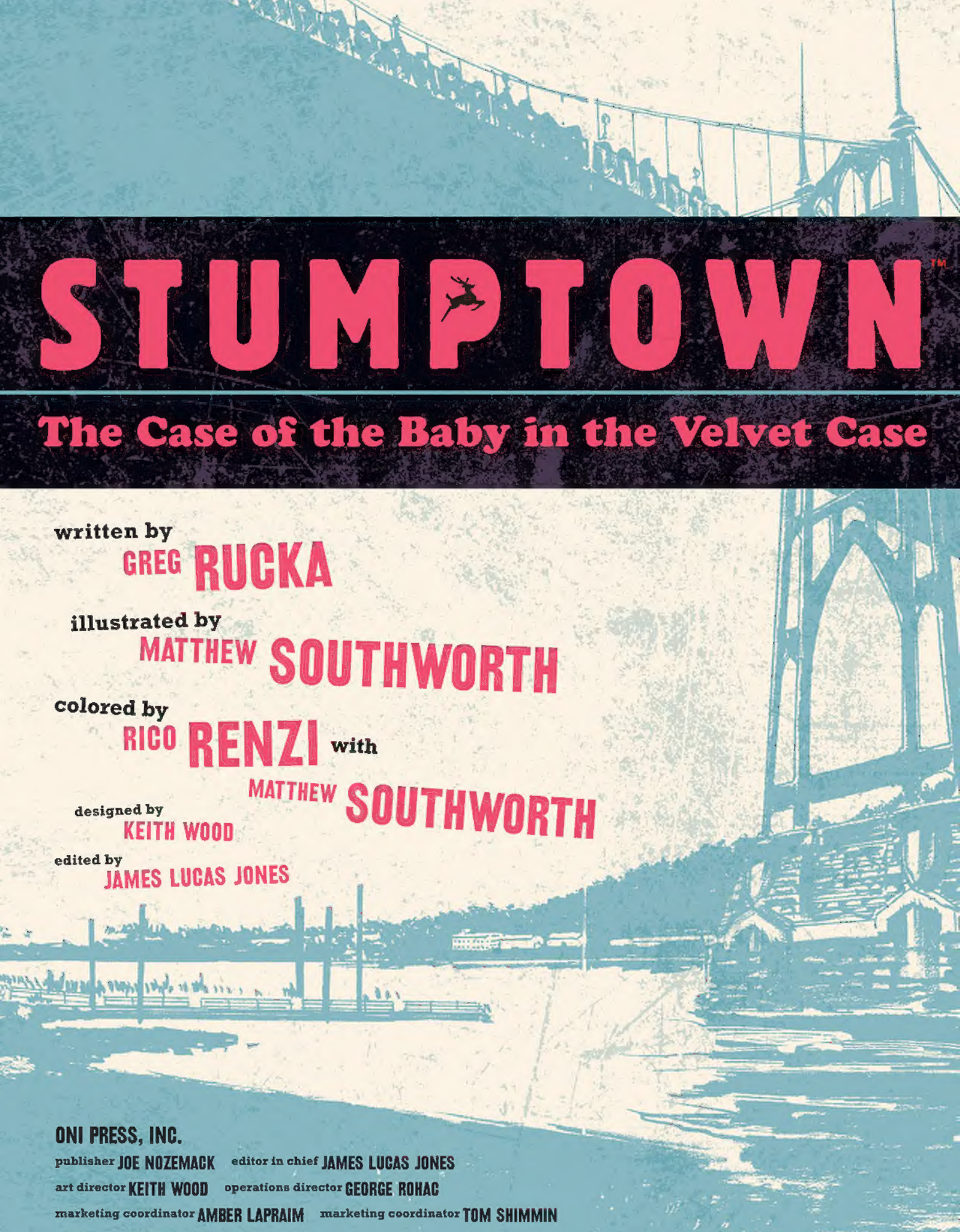

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## the case of the baby in the velvet case

## part three

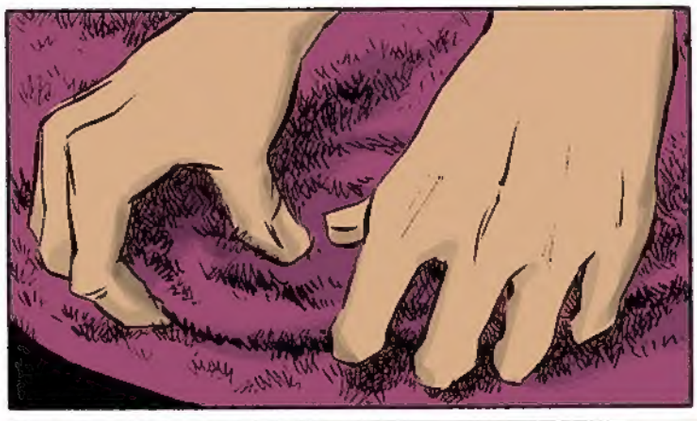
THERE WAS A MAN AT THE DOOR.
HOW DID IT GET HERE?
AT THE DOOR.
WHAT MAN?
DID HE GIVE A NAME?
HE SAID... HE SAID IT WAS F-FOR YOU.
IS THAT ALL?
ANSEL? DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE?
CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE? WAS HE IN A CAR?
DID HE SAY ANYTHING ELSE? ANYTHING AT ALL?
HE-HE-HE SAID YOU WOULD KNOW WHAT TO TO TO TO DO!
HE SAID YOU WOULD KNOW!
ANSEL--

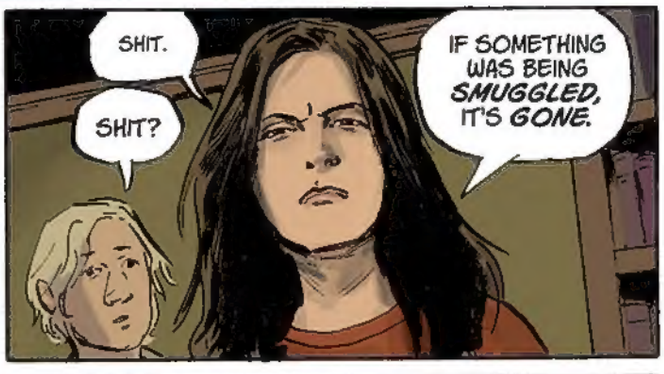
I D-D-DON'T REM-ME-REME-REMEMBER!
WHAT?
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BE MEAN.
I WASN'T BEING MEAN.

THEN THAT WAS A GREAT IMPRESSION OF IT.
SO I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO ASK? I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO FIND OUT WHERE THE HELL IT CAME FROM?
I KNOW MY BROTHER HAS DOWN'S, GREY, OKAY? I'M WELL AWARE OF HIS ABILITIES AND HIS LIMITS.
ANSEL DOESN'T NEED TO BE CODDLED.
WHY ARE YOU SO UPSET? THAT'S IT, RIGHT? THAT'S THE GUITAR?
MIM BRACCA'S GUITAR, MIM FROM TAILHOOK? HER GUITAR?
YES, IT'S HER GUITAR.
I TOTALLY WAS PLAYING MIM BRACCA'S GUITAR.

IT'S JUST... IT'S A REALLY NICE GUITAR, THE ACTION IS AMAZING, I BET IF YOU PLUGGED IT IN, THE TONE ON IT WOULD JUST...
MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO BE ALONE WITH IT FOR A LITTLE WHILE?
WELL... CASE CLOSED, NOW, RIGHT?
YOU CAN CALL HER UP AND NOT TELL HER I PLAYED IT AND LET HER KNOW YOU'VE FOUND BABY.
YEAH.
NO.
YEAH NO? WHY YEAH NO?
THE D.E.A. IS LOOKING FOR THE GUITAR.
SO CALL THE D.E.A., THEN.
...OR NOT?
I'M LOOKING FOR BABY, BABY JUST HAPPENS TO SHOW UP ON MY FRONT FUCKING DOORSTEP?
CHRIST, NOW I'M DOING IT, TOO.
THE GUITAR. THE GUITAR JUST SHOWS UP.

MAYBE WHOEVER TOOK IT FELT GUILTY?
OKAY, CLEARLY I'M *TWO* FOR *TWO* HERE, SO I'LL JUST *SHUT UP* FOR NOW, HOW ABOUT *THAT*?
UNLESS YOU'RE GOING FOR THREE OUT OF THREE, THAT'S AN IDEA.
Gibson
Gibson




SHIT.
SHIT?
IF SOMETHING WAS BEING SMUGGLED, IT'S GONE.

BUT THAT'S GOOD, RIGHT? MEANS SHE WASN'T INVOLVED?
ALL IT MEANS IS THAT THERE'S NOTHING IN THE CASE NOW, GREY.

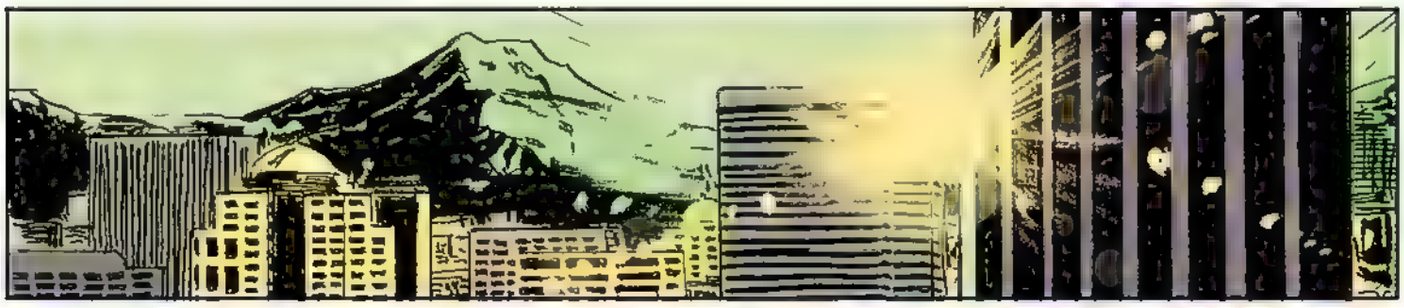
DOESN'T MEAN THERE WASN'T SOMETHING IN THE CASE TO BEGIN WITH.
I'M BACK TO CASE CLOSED. CALL HER UP AND GIVE HER BABY BACK.
WHY?
...BECAUSE SHE'S YOUR CLIENT AND IT'S HER GUITAR?
NO, WHY RETURN THE GUITAR? WHY NOT JUST DUMP IT AFTER YOU'D EMPTIED THE CASE OR WHATEVER?
YOU KNOW HOW MUCH BABY IS WORTH, DEX? CLAPTON GUITARS GO FOR TWO MILLION DOLLARS AT AUCTION.
MIM'S NOT CLAPTON, BUT... THAT'S MAYBE A MILLION BUCKS THERE. MAYBE.
YOU JUST MADE MY POINT.
...SO I HAVE.
TALK TO YOU LATER, GREY.
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.

ANSEL?
HEY. ANSEL.
I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME.
N-NO I CAN'T.
IT'S NOT ON, ANSEL.
MENU
I ST-STILL CAN'T HEAR Y-Y-YOU.
NU-UH.

I'M SORRY I WAS MEAN.
H-HE HAD GLASSES.
HE HAD GLASSES.
THANKS, ANSEL.

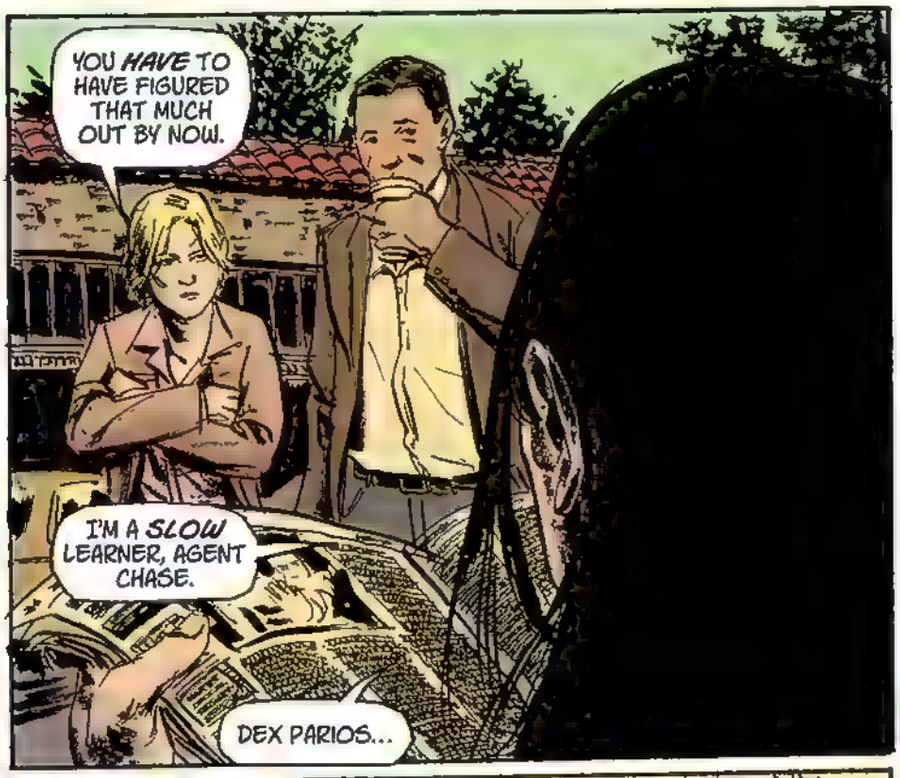
WHO'VE YOU BEEN OUT WITH, BABY?

WHERE'VE YOU BEEN?

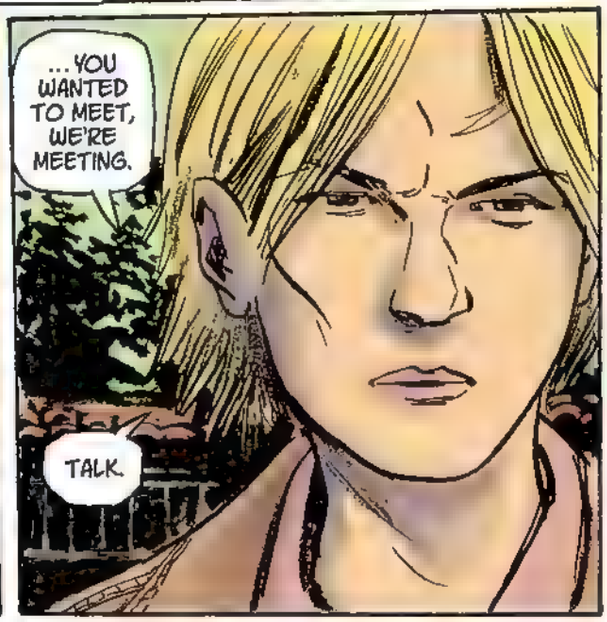


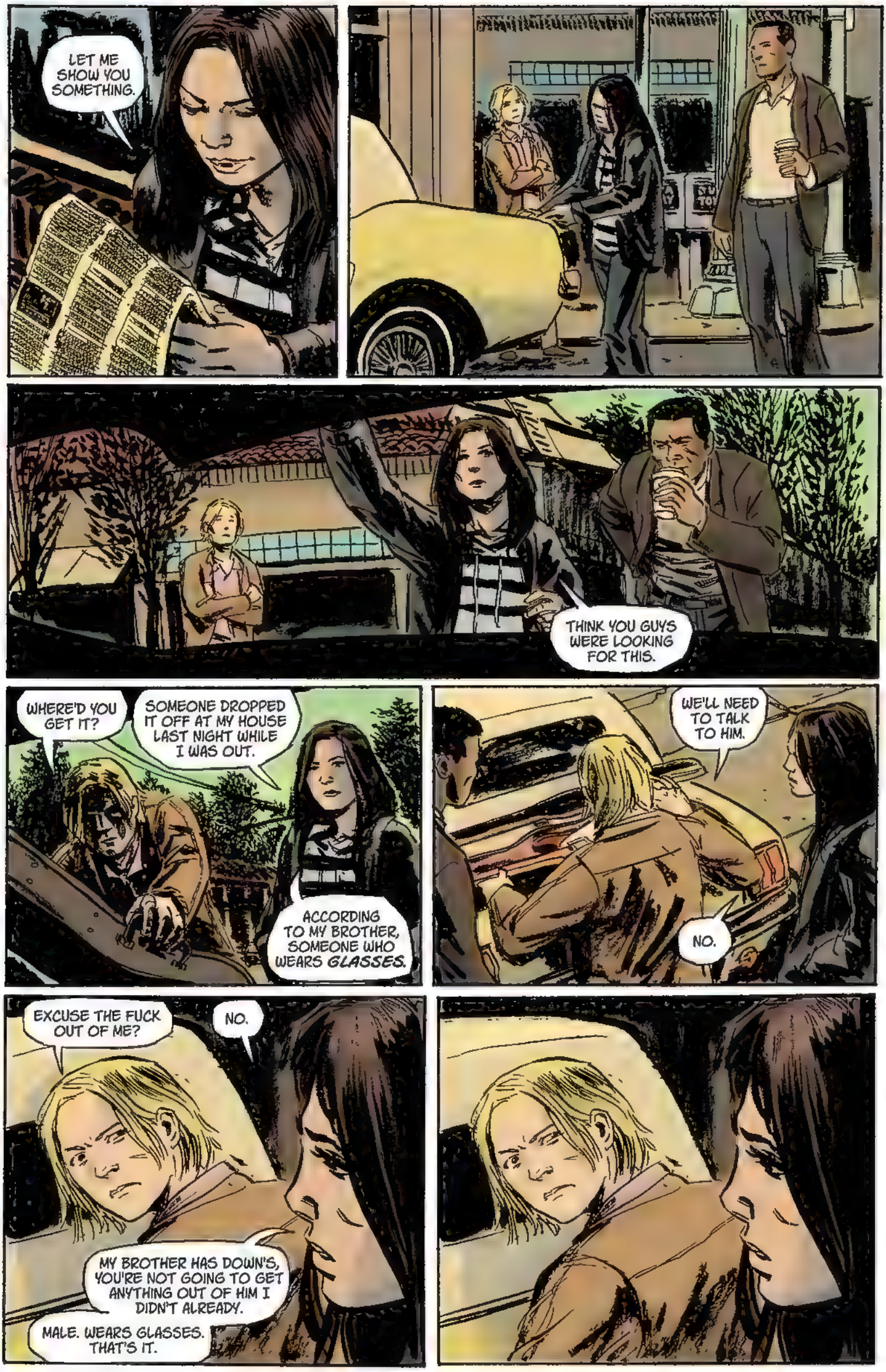
Peet's Coffee

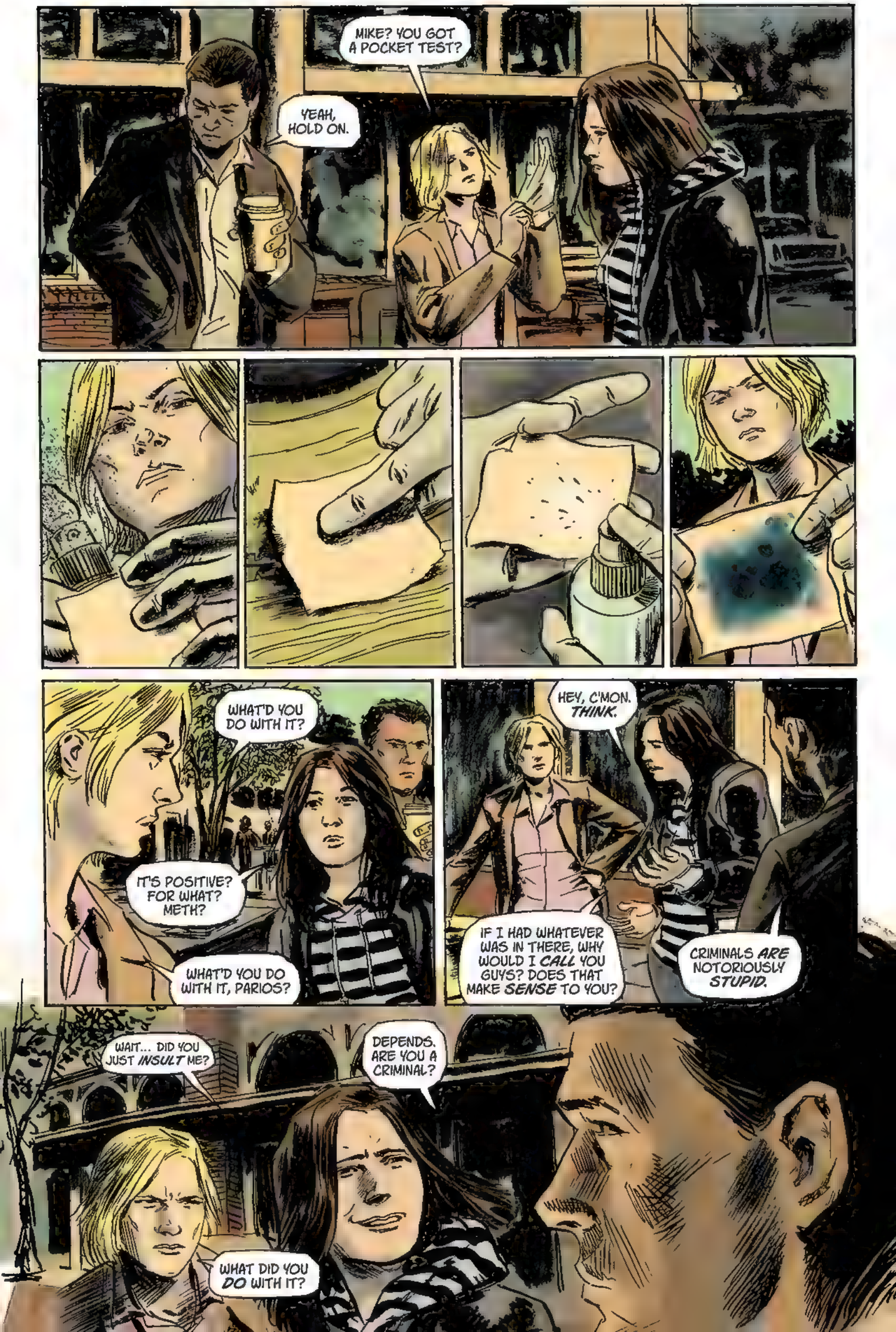
I DON'T LIKE YOU.

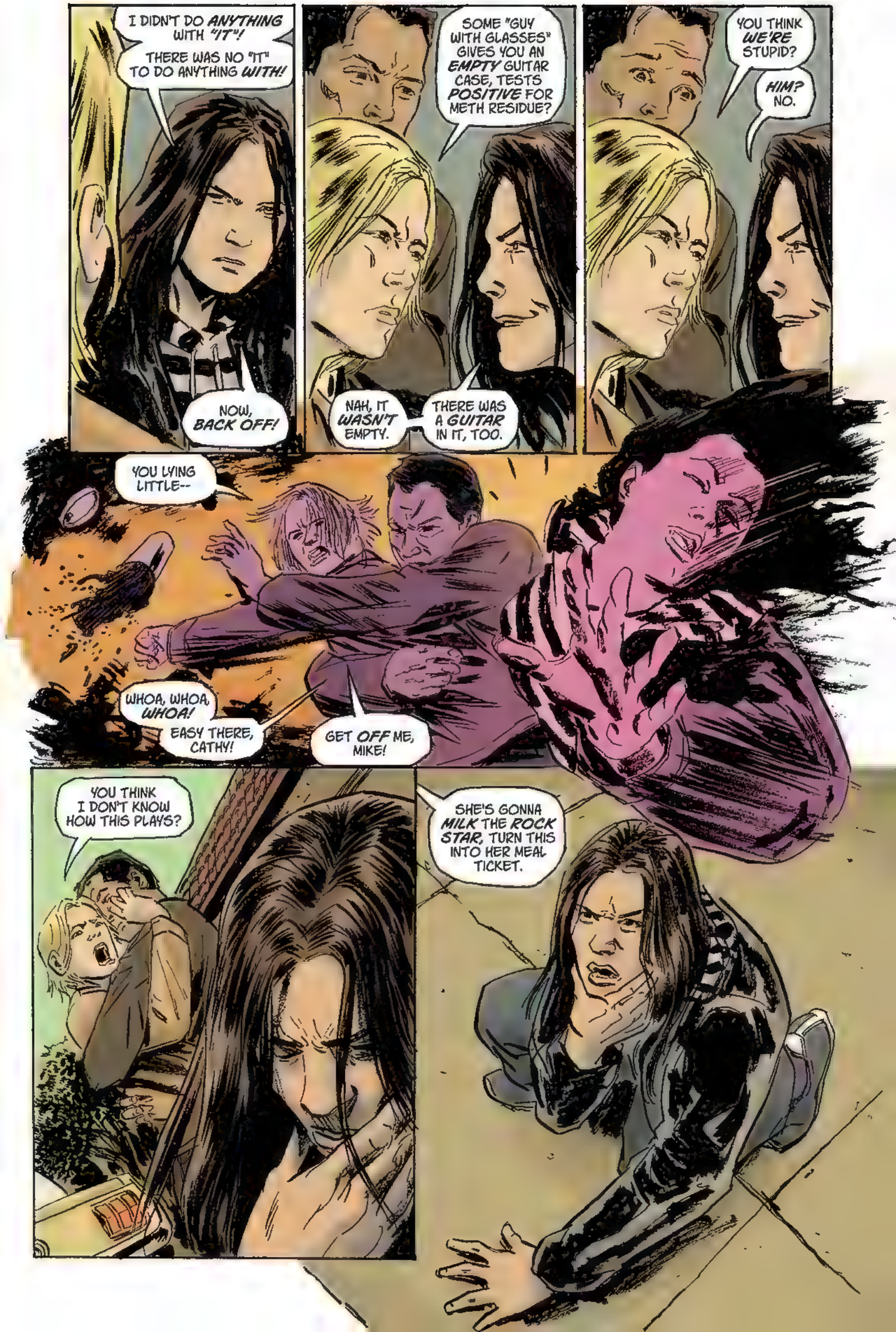

YOU HAVE TO HAVE FIGURED THAT MUCH OUT BY NOW.
I'M A SLOW LEARNER, AGENT CHASE.
DEX PARIOS...

...NICE TO MEET YOU.
MIKE VELA. PLEASURE.
YEAH, YEAH, YEAH, ALL VERY NICE...

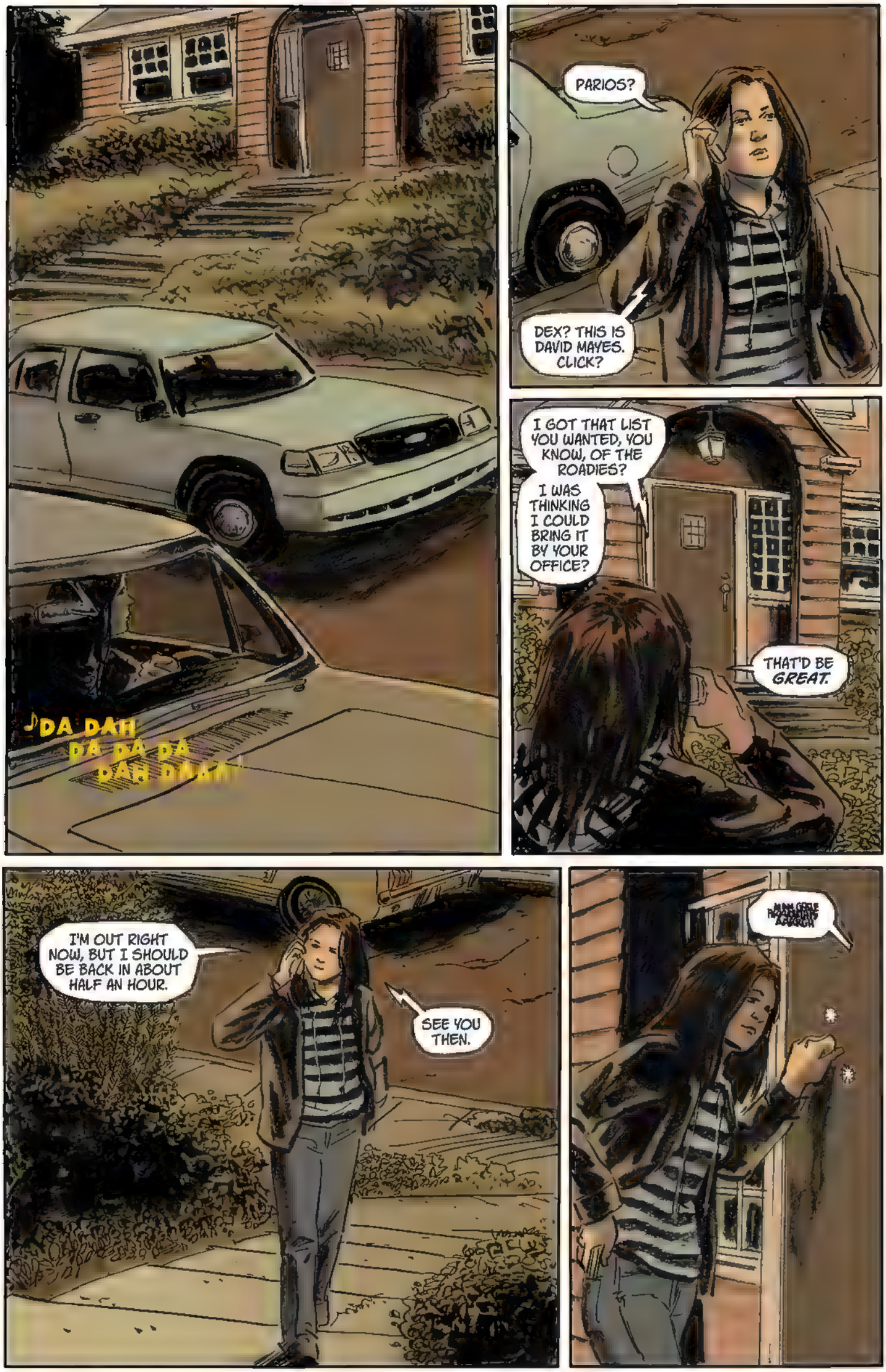

...YOU WANTED TO MEET, WE'RE MEETING.
TALK.


LET ME SHOW YOU SOMETHING.
THINK YOU GUYS WERE LOOKING FOR THIS.
WHERE'D YOU GET IT?
SOMEONE DROPPED IT OFF AT MY HOUSE LAST NIGHT WHILE I WAS OUT.
ACCORDING TO MY BROTHER, SOMEONE WHO WEARS GLASSES.
WE'LL NEED TO TALK TO HIM.
NO.
EXCUSE THE FUCK OUT OF ME?
NO.
MY BROTHER HAS DOWN'S, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET ANYTHING OUT OF HIM I DIDN'T ALREADY.
MALE. WEARS GLASSES. THAT'S IT.

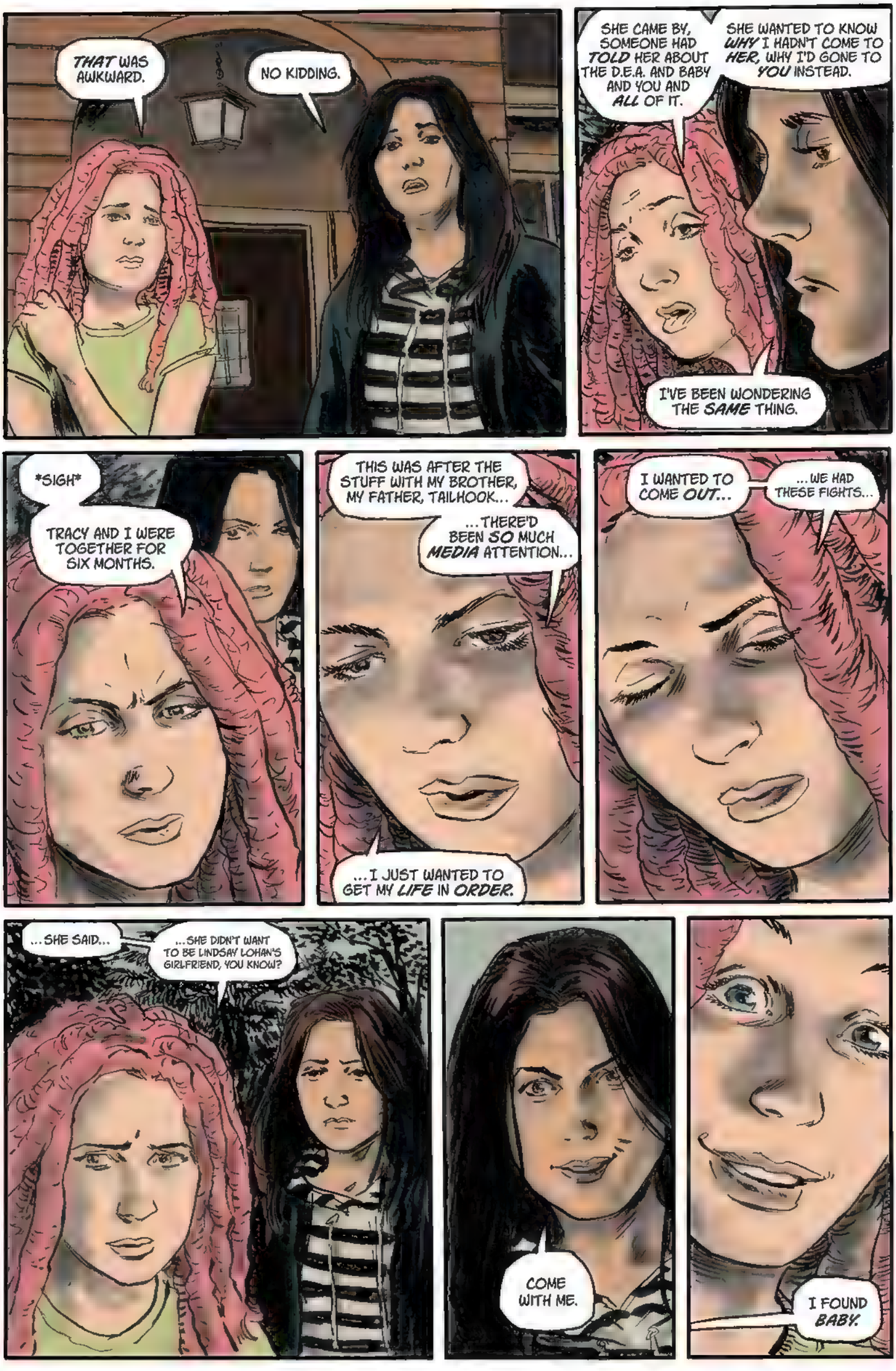

MIKE? YOU GOT A POCKET TEST?
YEAH, HOLD ON.
WHAT'D YOU DO WITH IT?
IT'S POSITIVE? FOR WHAT? METH?
WHAT'D YOU DO WITH IT, PARIOS?
HEY, C'MON. THINK.
IF I HAD WHATEVER WAS IN THERE, WHY WOULD I CALL YOU GUYS? DOES THAT MAKE SENSE TO YOU?
CRIMINALS ARE NOTORIOUSLY STUPID.
WAIT... DID YOU JUST INSULT ME?
DEPENDS. ARE YOU A CRIMINAL?
WHAT DID YOU DO WITH IT?


I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WITH "IT"!
THERE WAS NO "IT" TO DO ANYTHING WITH!
NOW, BACK OFF!
SOME "GUY WITH GLASSES" GIVES YOU AN EMPTY GUITAR CASE, TESTS POSITIVE FOR METH RESIDUE?
NAH, IT WASN'T EMPTY.
THERE WAS A GUITAR IN IT, TOO.
YOU THINK WE'RE STUPID?
HIM? NO.
YOU LYING LITTLE--
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA!
EASY THERE, CATHY!
GET OFF ME, MIKE!
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW HOW THIS PLAYS?
SHE'S GONNA MILK THE ROCK STAR, TURN THIS INTO HER MEAL TICKET.

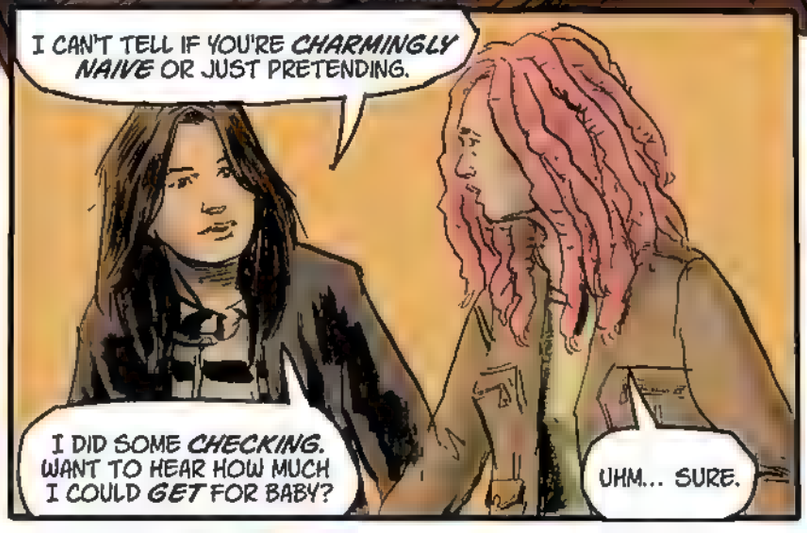
WRITE A BOOK, MAYBE? SELL THE STORY TO E! OR SOME FUCKING WEBSITE?
WE'RE BRINGING YOU IN FOR *QUESTIONING.*
YEAH, YOU DO THAT, BABY...
...THEN EXPLAIN TO THE D.O.J. WHY THEY'RE SUCKING A METRIC FUCKTON OF LAWSUIT FOR *HARASSMENT* AND *ASSAULT.*
IS THIS *EVIDENCE?* YOU NEED *THIS?*
IT'S EVIDENCE OF A CRIME, YEAH--
THEN FUCKING *TAKE* IT.
IT'S CALLED *RESPECT.*
YOUR PARTNER SHOULD FUCKING *LEARN* SOME.

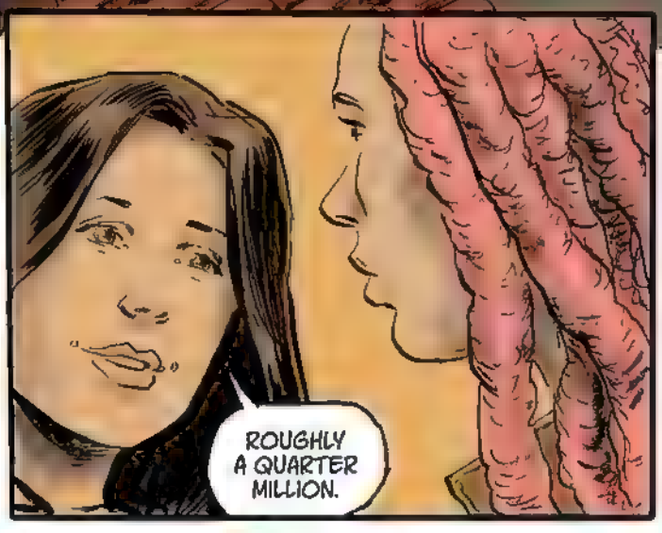

♪DA DAH
DA DA DA
DAH DAH
PARIOS?
DEX? THIS IS DAVID MAYES. CLICK?
I GOT THAT LIST YOU WANTED, YOU KNOW, OF THE ROADIES?
I WAS THINKING I COULD BRING IT BY YOUR OFFICE?
THAT'D BE GREAT.
I'M OUT RIGHT NOW, BUT I SHOULD BE BACK IN ABOUT HALF AN HOUR.
SEE YOU THEN.

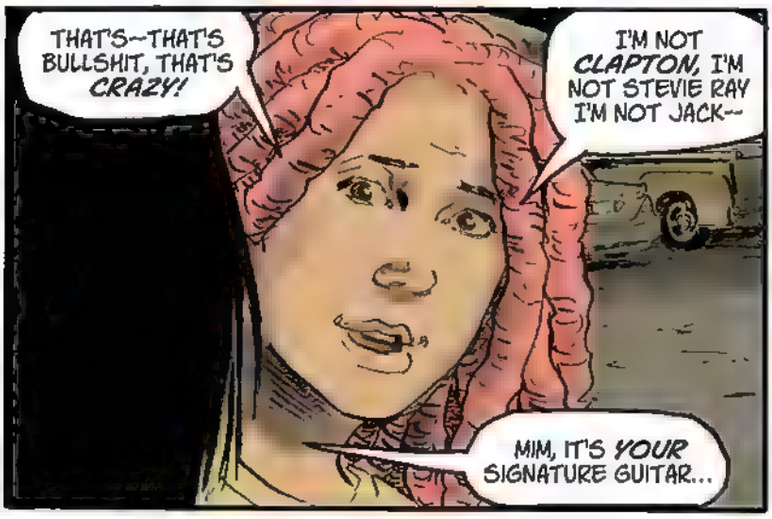
—TALK TO ME LIKE *THAT* AND THEN JUST WALK *OUT*?!?
*WATCH* ME, MIM!
AND *YOU*!
AND ME?
YOU THINK I WASN'T GOING TO FIND *OUT*?
YOU THINK I WASN'T GOING TO *KNOW* WHAT YOU TWO HAVE BEEN *UP* TO?
THAT'S NOT *FAIR*, TRACY! I *TOLD* HER NOT TO *TELL* YOU!
THEN THAT'S THE *FIRST* TIME SHE'S EVER DONE WHAT SHE'S *TOLD*!
YOU SHOULD HAVE *TOLD* ME. *BOTH* OF YOU.
YOU SHOULD HAVE *TOLD* ME.

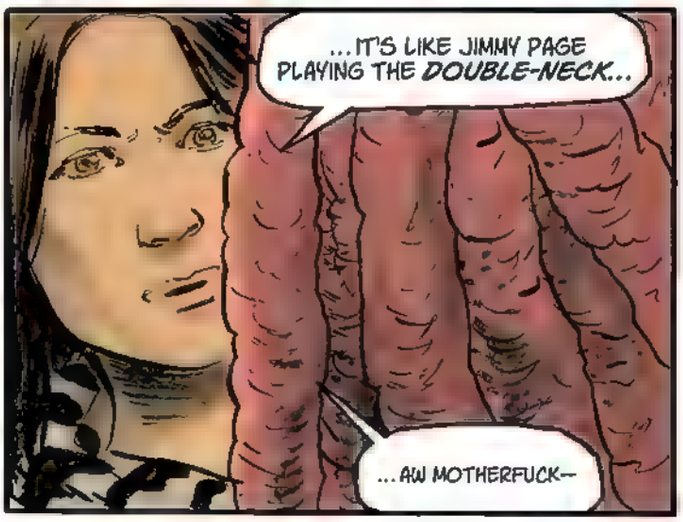

THAT WAS AWKWARD.
NO KIDDING.
SHE CAME BY, SOMEONE HAD TOLD HER ABOUT THE D.E.A. AND BABY AND YOU AND ALL OF IT.
SHE WANTED TO KNOW WHY I HADN'T COME TO HER, WHY I'D GONE TO YOU INSTEAD.
I'VE BEEN WONDERING THE SAME THING.
*SIGH*
TRACY AND I WERE TOGETHER FOR SIX MONTHS.
THIS WAS AFTER THE STUFF WITH MY BROTHER, MY FATHER, TAILHOOK...
...THERE'D BEEN SO MUCH MEDIA ATTENTION...
...I JUST WANTED TO GET MY LIFE IN ORDER.
I WANTED TO COME OUT...
...WE HAD THESE FIGHTS...
...SHE SAID...
...SHE DIDN'T WANT TO BE LINDSAY LOHAN'S GIRLFRIEND, YOU KNOW?
COME WITH ME.
I FOUND BABY.

I DIDN'T WANT TO BE DRIVING AROUND WITH IT IN THE MUSTANG.
YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW *MUCH* THAT GUITAR IS *WORTH?*
I TOLD YOU BEFORE, STEVEN PAID MAYBE FOUR THOUSAND FOR IT.


I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE *CHARMINGLY NAIVE* OR JUST PRETENDING.
I DID SOME *CHECKING.* WANT TO HEAR HOW MUCH I COULD *GET* FOR BABY?
UHM... SURE.


ROUGHLY A QUARTER MILLION.


THAT'S--THAT'S BULLSHIT, THAT'S *CRAZY!*
I'M NOT *CLAPTON,* I'M NOT STEVIE RAY I'M NOT JACK--
MIM, IT'S *YOUR* SIGNATURE GUITAR...


...IT'S LIKE JIMMY PAGE PLAYING THE *DOUBLE-NECK...*
...AW MOTHERFUCK--

--STAY HERE!
WAIT!
WAIT.
JUST PUT IT DOWN, MAN.
YOU TALKING TO ME?
ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?
MAN, YOUR TRAVIS BICKLE SHIT IS WEAK.
BRAD? IT'S NOT HERE, MAN. THERE'S JUST THE GUITAR!

WHERE IS IT?
WHERE'S WHAT?
UH, BRAD?
SHUT UP, MICK!
WHERE'S OUR STUFF, BOY?
BRAAAD--
GOD DAMMIT, MICK--
--WHAT?!?
HELLO, ASSHOLE.
CLICK? HOW'S BABY?
SAFE AND SOUND.
RIGHT...

...WHICH ONE OF YOU ASSHOLES DO I SHOOT FIRST?

# WHY P.I.? PART THREE ➢ STANDING ALONE, AND IN GOOD COMPANY

"When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it. Then it happens we were in the detective business. Well, when one of your organization gets killed it's bad business to let the killer get away with it. It's bad all around—bad for that one organization, bad for every detective everywhere."

Sam Spade, *The Maltese Falcon*
–Dashiell Hammett

The PI stands alone. It's their gig, it's part of the mystique, it's part of their damn job description.

Private Investigator.

There are character reasons for this; most frequently this manifests as a distrust of authority and/or a dislike of having to follow rules made by others. There are genre reasons for this; the detective's job requires her to achieve a position of objectivity that will allow for an impartial viewing of the facts germane to the investigation. There are literary reasons for this; if the detective is the means by which we receive her commentary upon the society—a flawed society, by definition, or else we wouldn't need the PI's services—then her participation in the same must therefore be limited.

In publishing, these types of novels, these lone protagonist stories, are referred to as "lone wolves," and it's not entirely glib. Certainly, when looking at the genre as a means of social commentary, it's quite apt; the detective exists at the periphery of the pack, a position that allows her to both watch over and interact at her discretion; it is a position that allows her to swoop in and cut out the sickness as it is discovered.

American literature, as discussed previously, loves its lone heroes, and deeply romanticizes that role. Yet there is a peril to this place. This isolation has a cost. How can you protect and serve that of which you are no part? How, and more importantly, why, would you even care? And, bearing in mind the tropes of the genre—a genre filled with sex and violence and retribution—how does the detective keep from becoming that which she beholds? The Mickey Spillane classic, *I, The Jury*, pretty much says it all in the title. Mike Hammer is Judge, Jury, and Executioner, and has the arrogance to believe that's a good thing, and one can argue that in Spillane's world, it is. Hammer, after all, abides by his Code above all things.

Ah, the Code.

I mentioned this last time, but it bears further examination here. It's easy to interpret the Code as a moral and ethical high ground, as immutable and universal, but that is not the case. If you're familiar with *The Maltese Falcon*, you know that Spade isn't the most ethical of men, nor the most moral (he'll wring every last cent from a client if he can manage it, and the less said about what's going on between him and Miles' wife, Iva, the better). Yet his adherence to his own Code is unwavering. It doesn't matter that he didn't particularly seem to like Miles Archer; it doesn't matter that he's got it bad for Brigid O'Shaughnessy. Archer was his partner, and his partner has been murdered. For Spade, that is where the line is drawn.

"He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it." Who tells him he must? Not the Law. Not Iva. Hell, Iva thinks he did it. It's Spade himself who believes he's supposed to do something about it. The duty has fallen to him, and there is no choice in the matter. It is imperative, above all else—above law, wealth, even love. It is a matter of honor, deeply personal, and thus entirely individual.

Spade's Code is not Rockford's Code is not Spenser's Code is not—you'll forgive my arrogance—Dex's Code. But all are united by the same trait, the individual detective's sense of personal honor, an honor so strong that the detective holds it above the Law itself.

Yet, if the Code is so slippery, and the detective in such perilous isolation, how then does she remain constant? How then does she not, in truth, become Judge, Jury, and Executioner in the worst possible way? What is there to prevent her from going too far?

And here we come to the supporting cast, and it's an interesting stop along our journey. These are the individuals who ground the detective, who keep her on task and on track, and who, crucially, insulate and define the borders of, not solely her world, but her mission. These are the people for whom, ultimately, she fights. These are the reminders of purpose, and the bastions of trust. In a genre rife with deception, where even the client is suspect, these people are True. Without them, the detective would be adrift, would be left with a Code that is empty, in service to no one but herself. That's not a hero. That is, at best, an anti-hero. At worst, that's a villain.

But the world is messy, and the Code has its limits. As the genre has progressed post-Vietnam, we've seen the edges of this tested time and again. Stories where, once, the detective could be counted on to achieve her aim without compromise have now come into conflict with stories that test her resolve in entirely new ways; injustices that demand an answer, that could destroy the detective utterly.

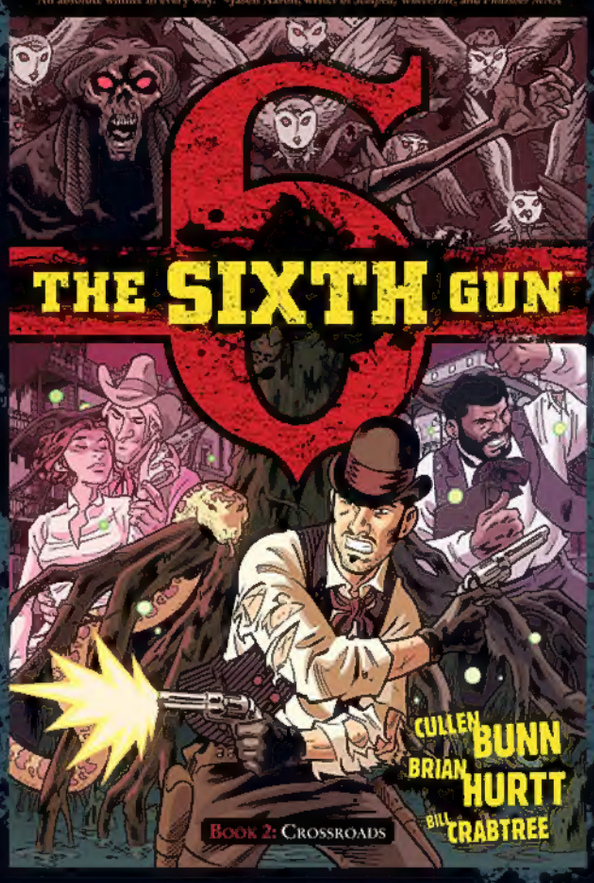
It is no accident that most modern detectives can count amongst their friends one or two individuals who exist even further afield than they. If the detective stands watch at the border of the society, it is these new characters who prevent her detaching from its bubble entirely. These are the characters who allow the detective's Code to remain intact, by doing what they cannot. These are the characters who allow the detective to remain—referring to Chandler again—the "best man in his world and a good enough man for any world."

Which brings us to a further examination of that world for next time...

GREG RUCKA, PORTLAND, OREGON

# HOW THE WEST WAS REALLY WON.

"Say hello to your new favorite comic." –Matt Fraction, *The Invincible Iron Man, Casanova*
6
THE SIXTH GUN
CULLEN BUNN
BRIAN HURTT
BOOK 1: COLD DEAD FINGERS


"An absolute winner in every way." –Jason Aaron, writer of *Scalped, Wolverine,* and *Punisher MAX*
6
THE SIXTH GUN
CULLEN BUNN
BRIAN HURTT
BILL CRABTREE
BOOK 2: CROSSROADS

"Say hello to your new favorite comic."
–Matt Fraction
*The Invincible Iron Man, Uncanny X-Men*

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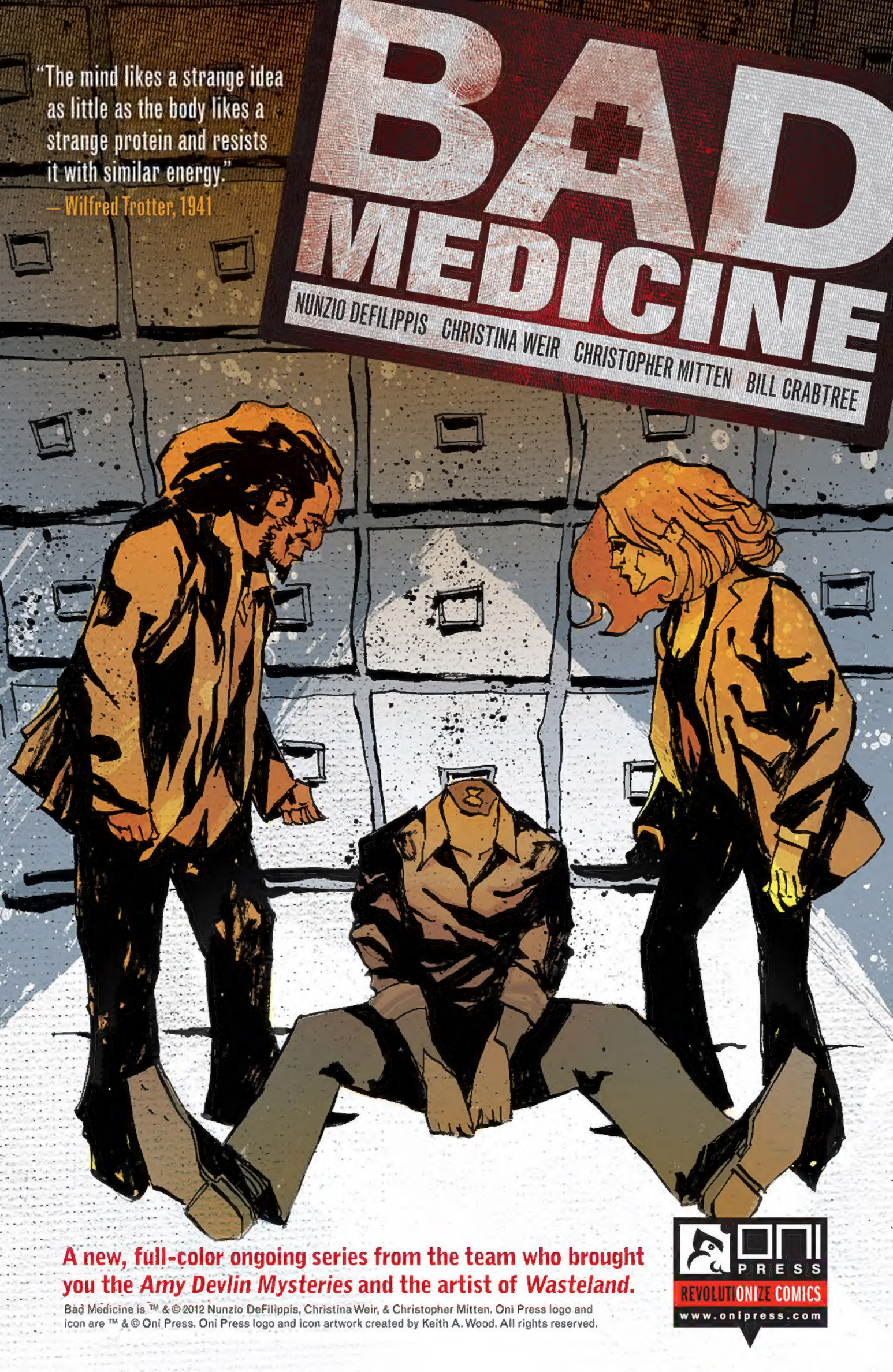
"The mind likes a strange idea as little as the body likes a strange protein and resists it with similar energy."
— Wilfred Trotter, 1941
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NUNZIO DEFILIPPIS CHRISTINA WEIR CHRISTOPHER MITTEN BILL CRABTREE
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